

1. A steering wheel comprising:  
a center portion;  
an outer rim encircling the center portion;  
an airbag cover positioned on the center portion; and  
5 an intermediate portion positioned between the center portion and the outer rim,  
the steering wheel being constructed such that there is no gap at the interface between the  
cover and the intermediate portion.
2. A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the intermediate portion comprises  
10 one or more functional features.
3. A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the intermediate portion comprises  
one or more decorative features.
4. A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the steering wheel further  
15 comprises an upper housing that is capable of being depressed from a normal position to  
a compressed position.
5. A steering wheel as in claim 4 wherein the steering wheel is constructed  
20 such that there is no gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion  
when the upper housing is in the normal position.

6. A steering wheel as in claim 4 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that there is no gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion when the upper housing is in the compressed position.

5 7. A steering wheel as in claim 4 wherein the steering wheel in constructed such that depressing the airbag housing from the normal position to the compressed position produces a gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

8. A steering wheel as in claim 4 wherein the upper housing may be  
10 depressed from the normal position to the compressed position by applying a force to the cover.

9. A steering wheel as in claim 8 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that if the force is removed, the upper housing will move from the compressed  
15 position into the normal position.

10. A steering wheel as in claim 4 further comprising a horn assembly configured such that depressing the airbag housing from the normal position to the compressed position actuates the horn assembly.

20 11. A steering wheel as in claim 10 wherein the horn assembly includes one or more springs.

12. A steering wheel as in claim 11 wherein the one or more springs function to move the upper housing from the compressed position to the normal position.

5 13. A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the intermediate portion includes an overhanging portion.

14. A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the cover comprises a shingle.

10 15. A steering wheel as in claim 14 wherein the cover includes a flex point.

16. A steering wheel as in claim 1 further comprising a lower housing.

15 17. A steering wheel as in claim 16 wherein the intermediate portion is mounted to the lower housing.

18. A steering wheel as in claim 1 further comprising an airbag and an inflator.

20 19. A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the center portion comprises a casting.

20. A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the center portion includes a shell.

21. A steering wheel as in claim 1 further comprising one or more retention hangers that are designed to engage a retaining wire.

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22. A steering wheel comprising:  
a center portion;  
an outer rim encircling the center portion;  
an airbag cover positioned on the center portion; and  
5 an intermediate portion positioned between the center portion and the outer rim,  
the intermediate portion comprising an overhanging portion constructed such that there is  
no gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

23. A steering wheel as in claim 22 wherein the intermediate portion  
10 comprises one or more functional features.

24. A steering wheel as in claim 22 wherein the intermediate portion  
comprises one or more decorative features.

25. A steering wheel as in claim 22 wherein the steering wheel further  
15 comprises an upper housing that is capable of being depressed from a normal position to  
a compressed position.

26. A steering wheel as in claim 25 wherein the steering wheel is constructed  
20 such that when the upper housing is in the normal position, there is no gap at the  
interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

27. A steering wheel as in claim 25 wherein depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position produces a gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

5 28. A steering wheel as in claim 25 further comprising a horn assembly configured such that depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position actuates the horn assembly.

10 29. A steering wheel as in claim 25 wherein the upper housing may be depressed from the normal position to the compressed position by applying a force to the cover.

15 30. A steering wheel as in claim 29 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that if the force is removed, the upper housing will move from the compressed position into the normal position.

31. A steering wheel as in claim 22 further comprising an airbag and an inflator.

20 32. A steering wheel as in claim 22 further comprising a lower housing, the intermediate portion being mounted to the lower plate.

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33. A steering wheel comprising:  
a center portion;  
an outer rim encircling the center portion;  
an airbag cover positioned on the center portion, the cover comprising a shingle;  
an intermediate portion positioned between the center portion and the outer rim,  
the intermediate portion being attached to a shingle that is constructed such that there is  
no gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

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34. A steering wheel as in claim 33 wherein the cover comprises a flex point.

35. A steering wheel as in claim 33 wherein the intermediate portion  
comprises one or more functional features.

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36. A steering wheel as in claim 33 wherein the intermediate portion  
comprises one or more decorative features.

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37. A steering wheel as in claim 33 wherein the steering wheel further  
comprises an upper housing that is capable of being depressed from a normal position to  
a compressed position.

38. A steering wheel as in claim 37 wherein the steering wheel is constructed  
such that when the upper housing is in the normal position, there is no gap at the  
interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

39. A steering wheel as in claim 37 wherein depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position does not produce a gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

5 40. A steering wheel as in claim 37 further comprising a horn assembly configured such that depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position actuates the horn assembly.

10 41. A steering wheel as in claim 37 wherein the upper housing may be depressed from the normal position to the compressed position by applying a force to the cover.

15 42. A steering wheel as in claim 41 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that if the force is removed, the upper housing will move from the compressed position into the normal position.

43. A steering wheel as in claim 33 further comprising an airbag and an inflator.

20 44. A steering wheel as in claim 33 further comprising a lower housing, the intermediate portion being mounted to the lower plate.



45. An intermediate portion designed to be positioned on a steering wheel between a center portion and an outer rim, the intermediate portion comprising an overhanging portion that is constructed such that there is no gap between the intermediate portion and an airbag cover.

46. An intermediate portion as in claim 45 wherein the intermediate portion is mounted on a lower housing.

47. An intermediate portion as in claim 45 wherein the overhanging portion is constructed to overlap and fit tightly with the airbag cover.

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48. An intermediate portion designed to be positioned on a steering wheel between a center portion and an outer rim, the intermediate portion being attached to a shingle that is constructed such that there is no gap between the intermediate portion and an airbag cover.

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49. An intermediate portion as in claim 48 wherein the intermediate portion is mounted on a lower housing.

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50. An intermediate portion as in claim 48 wherein the cover comprises a flex point.

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